PERSPECTIVES

ON ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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Introduction

BY CHAD O. BRAND

Since very early in Christian history, the question of the relation of the church to Israel has been an important topic. It is a topic that graces the pages of the New Testament and is, arguably, an issue that is found in incipient form in the Old Testament as well. The early church fathers debated this relationship, as has the church throughout the ages. The debate continues today, having heated up in the late nineteenth century, especially between theologians in the covenantal (Reformed Calvinism, Zwinglianism, etc.) tradition and those from the newer dispensational tradition. In this introduction, I will provide a brief history of this conversation and then pose the key questions that the authors of these chapters were asked to address.

Historical Survey

The earliest Christians were Jews. That is abundantly clear from the book of Acts, but it is also clear that Gentile Christianity was not far behind (see Acts 8 for the first recorded Samaritan conversions and Acts 10 for the first recorded Gentile evangelism). Many key Jewish leaders, especially in the Herod-and-Pilate-dominated Judean region, attempted to repress this early

Christian movement, at least in part because it constituted a threat to their own political and economic status. Even when the apostle to the Gentiles carried the gospel to Galatia, then to Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and other "Gentile" places, Jewish opposition dogged his steps. Early on, this set Jews and Christians (both Jewish and Gentile) in opposition to one another.

That opposition continued in the postapostolic setting. One contributing factor was that a number of the early Christian thinkers were trained in the philosophical schools of the time, and their Greek orientation often conflicted with the Hebrew Scriptures.[1] An early example of this is the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*. Likely written by Christians in Alexandria (a city heavily under the influence of Greek philosophical thought) around AD 130, the epistle interprets the Old Testament in an allegorical fashion, thus coping with the conflict between Hebrew and Greek thinking by converting Hebraic thought into Greek. In addition, the short work claims that Moses' throwing down of the tablets at the foot of Sinai was meant to show that the Jews would one day abandon the covenant, and that the covenant would then be transferred to the church.[2] The letter also states that Christ was manifested in order that the Israelites might be "perfected in their iniquities, and that we, being constituted heirs through Him, might receive the testament of the Lord Jesus."[3] The church, in effect, *replaces* Israel as the locus of the covenant, with no indication that Israel is still precious in God's sight.

Other second-century church fathers held similar views. Justin Martyr was one of those trained in Greek thought, specifically middle Platonism. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin claims that Jesus is the true heir of Israel and that the Jews have been rejected so that we who follow Jesus might be the "true Israelitic Race."[4] Exemplary Old Testament figures are treated as

[1] Our survey will be only representative, not exhaustive.

[2] *Epistle of Barnabas*, 4.7–9, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1885). Unless noted otherwise, our sources from the period before AD 325 are from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 vols., series ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, Henry Wace [New York: Christian Literature Co., 1885]). The set was first published by T&T Clark in Edinburgh, appearing in individual volumes from 1867–1873.

[3] *Epistle of Barnabas*, 14.5, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1.

[4] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew*, 135.

Christians, and circumcision is not the sign of the covenant so much as a harbinger of Israel's breaking the covenant.[5] Irenaeus was not as critical of Judaism as others in his day, his interpretation of the Old Testament in a more literal way being crucial to his criticism of Gnosticism, but he held out little hope for any future for the people of Israel. He preferred to see Old Testament expectations of a future time of glory as fulfilled only in the future glory of the church.[6]

In the third century Tertullian argued that Judaism is now made to serve the church, since the Jews are a "contumacious people," and since the covenant has been taken from them.[7] Origen followed the example of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (and the Jewish philosopher Philo) in employing an allegorical hermeneutic with reference to Old Testament interpretation, though not exclusively so. This was in part because Origen was deeply involved in constructing an *apologia* for the Christian faith over against its detractors in Alexandria, men such as Celsus. They regularly reminded him of "immoral" texts in the Old Testament, such as Lot's incest with his daughters and David's adultery. An allegorical hermeneutic allowed Origen to sanitize such texts and to show, to his satisfaction, that the "real meaning" was not to be found in the story as such, but beneath the story.[8] Because he was a foe of Gnosticism (and for other reasons), Origen did not denigrate the literal meaning of the Old Testament; he just did not find that meaning to be of the highest concern. In his most important work, Origen distinguished between "corporeal" Israel and "spiritual" Israel (the church), thus originating the tendency found in much later hermeneutics of "spiritualizing" the promises of God to Israel so that they apply to the church in a nonliteral way.[9] For Origen, Israel was no longer the people of God but rather was like a divorced wife in whom something unseemly has been found, while the church is the new bride.[10] This was a full-blown "replacement theology," and this spiritualizing

[5] Ibid., 16.2.
[6] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.34.
[7] Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, 2–3.
[8] Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 132–36.
[9] Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.4.22.
[10] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 14.22.

approach would be taken up by Augustine and especially by many later representatives of the amillennial school of interpretation.[11]

In his early writings, Augustine (fourth and early fifth centuries) followed the basic approach to eschatology hammered out by Justin Martyr and others, known as Chiliasm or premillennialism.[12] He conceived of history as consisting of six ages, followed by a "golden age" in which there would be peace and cosmic renewal.[13] The seventh age would be the millennium, interpreted in broadly literal fashion, though not lasting a thousand years since it would have no end. Here the church would be purged of all of its ills, and rest would finally be achieved. Somewhat oddly, Augustine did not believe that this was the eternal state, since it would happen in history and would be the prelude to an eternal time of bliss.[14] But, in his final years, writing his *magnum opus*, *The City of God*, Augustine adopted a different view. Here he argues that the millennium of Revelation 20 is symbolic of "all the years of the Christian era."[15] The "first resurrection" of Rev 20:4 is the conversion of the Christian that occurs at baptism, while the "second resurrection" (Rev 20:5) is the resurrection of the body at the Second Advent of Christ.[16] This book thus first set forth the schema that would later be known as amillennialism.

What of his attitude toward Israel? In the same work the African Father speaks of the Israelites as being faithful to the Lord in Egypt, in that they did not worship Neptune when delivered through the Red Sea, nor did they develop a shrine to the goddess "Mannia" when they received food by God's mercy in the wilderness. But eventually they were "seduced by impious gods" and "at last putting to death the Christ." If they had not done this, "they would have remained in the same kingdom which, even if it did not grow in extent, would have grown in happiness."[17] They

[11] One major exception to this kind of "spiritualizing" tendency among amillennialists is Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

[12] Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133.

[13] Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees, Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* (New York: New City, 2004), 1.35–41.

[14] Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 133.

[15] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.7.

[16] Ibid., 20.5, 20.9.

[17] Ibid., 4.34.

did not, and so now are dispersed "by the providence of the true God."[18] That is not the end of it for Augustine, however. Though he is careful not to set dates or to be too specific about the actual way these things will happen, he did articulate a list of things that would happen at the end: the return of Elijah, the conversion of the Jewish people to faith in Christ, the persecution of the saints by Antichrist, the Second Advent of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the separation of the righteous from the impenitent, the renewal of this world, and the final judgment, not necessarily in that order.[19] With his hopefulness for the conversion of the Jews, Augustine softened the negativism toward these people that we have seen with some of his forefathers, which is all the more remarkable when you know that his "father in the faith," Ambrose, actually promoted the persecution of Jews in Milan. Still, Augustine further championed the view earlier advocated by the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Origen that the church has now replaced Israel as the people of God.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a fully developed covenantal (or, federal) theology grew out of the work of the Reformers who were most associated with the Calvin (as opposed to the Luther) wing of the Reformation. This covenant theology can trace some of its roots back to the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the writings of Justin and Augustine, in the sense that the covenantal theologians agree that the new covenant spoken of in Scripture was not effected in national Israel, but in Christ, and then bequeathed to the church at Pentecost.[20] John Calvin often wrote about the covenants in the Bible, but his theology, following a trinitarian and biblical/exegetical contour, did not itself reflect the full-blown covenantalism of his followers in the next century. The Zurich Reformers, Zwingli and Bullinger, came closer to establishing this approach to systematic and biblical theology.[21] Johannes Cocceius, professor at the University

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 20.30.

[20] For a helpful discussion of some of the historical issues related to the new covenant, see Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 68–97.

[21] Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 503–4.

of Leyden from 1650 until his death in 1669, contended that the Bible presents a redemptive-historical understanding of salvation enshrined in three covenants: the covenant of works made with Adam, the covenant of grace made with Moses, and the new covenant effected through Christ.[22] But it was among English Calvinists, especially James Ussher and then the Westminster Assembly (1644–48), that covenant theology in its mature form came to be defined.[23]

In its developed form, covenant theology came to affirm that God's relation to humans could be understood in reference to three covenants: "the pre-temporal 'covenant of redemption' (*pactum salutis*) between the persons of the Godhead; the 'covenant of works' (*foederus naturae*) made with Adam before the Fall on behalf of the entire human race; and the 'covenant of grace' (*foederus gratiae*) made through Christ with all who believe, namely, the elect."[24] The Westminster Confession articulates the covenant of grace in this manner:

> Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by [the covenant of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace, wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all of those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.

This confession of faith proclaims "the unity of the covenant of grace and the oneness of the people of God in all ages."[25] The covenant of grace subsumes within itself all of the biblical covenants that are enjoined in the postfallen condition of humanity (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the new covenant). At the heart of covenant theology is the conviction that the "genealogical principle" articulated in the Abrahamic covenant, codified

[22] Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in the Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2004), 48.

[23] Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 504–5; Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 47–54.

[24] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 57.

[25] Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 506.

in the command to circumcise the male children (Gen 17:9–14), continues into the new covenant, though circumcision is now replaced by the baptism of all children.[26] Further, the church now has virtually replaced Israel in the economy of salvation, though some covenant theologians still hold out hope for a future ingathering of Jews into the church.[27] In effect, in covenant theology, the new covenant is a *renewal* of the Abrahamic covenant rather than being something inherently *new*.[28] Covenant theology has been very influential especially in Presbyterian and Reformed circles and somewhat influential among Calvinists in other traditions.[29]

Believers' church advocates (Baptists and others) contend that the genealogical principle is misguided. They argue that there are no clear NT texts that advocate infant baptism, and they further insist that the idea that baptism in the NT is a corollary to circumcision in the OT is an unfounded assumption. While some Baptists have adopted certain elements of covenant theology, especially its Calvinistic soteriology, most have not historically affirmed the basic hermeneutical emphasis that binds covenant theology together. So, while some of them have accepted the idea of the three-fold covenant (articulated above), they do not accept the genealogical principle.

In the early nineteenth century, a theological system gained popularity that grew out of insights from previous thinkers but was itself essentially new. Borrowing from the premillennialism of the early church and from some of Luther's ideas about the contrast between gospel and law, J. N. Darby and others first in England and then in America developed the system that came to be known as dispensational theology.[30] Dispensationalism has gone through

[26] Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 935–50; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant,* 63.

[27] See, for example, John Murray, "The Last Things," in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, ed. Iain Murray (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 409–10.

[28] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 63, 223–300.

[29] In this volume, the chapter by Robert Reymond lays out the covenant theology position.

[30] On the history of dispensationalism, see especially Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982*, enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 13–127; Richard R. Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-,*

a series of developments since the time of Darby, so that Blaising and Bock can speak of "classical," "revised," and "progressive" dispensationalism.[31] In 1965 Charles Ryrie published what would turn out to be the standard treatment on dispensationalism from the "revised" school.[32] In that book he listed three basic themes that make dispensationalism distinctive: a consistently literal hermeneutic, a focus on the glory of God, and, most famously, his identification of the *sine qua non* of the system: "What then is the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism? . . . A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct."[33] That conviction can be read back into "classical" dispensationalism and is found, to a lesser degree, in the "progressive" dispensationalist authors.[34] For dispensational theologians, then, promises made in the Old Testament to Israel, in some manner, must be fulfilled with reference to Israel and not the church. So, for traditional dispensationalist authors (and to some degree the "progressives") the promises of land as an "eternal promise" (e.g., Gen 15:17–21) must be literally fulfilled in the future by Israel once again inhabiting its ancient homeland, whether in this age, in the millennial kingdom, or in the new heavens and new earth.[35] Wellum and Gentry refer to this as the "land principle" and note that, whereas covenant interpreters see the genealogical principle as being continuous across the ages, dispensational interpreters see the land principle as the point of continuity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants on the one hand and the new covenant on the other, at least in its future application.[36] This view is buttressed in more traditional dispensational circles (what Blaising and Bock call "classical" and "revised") by the belief that the church constitutes a "parenthesis" or,

or Post-Tribulational? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 9–44; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1993), 9–56.

[31] Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 21–56.

[32] Note that Ryrie did not use that terminology, but he did offer some "correctives" to the older writers, represented by Darby, Scofield, and others.

[33] Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 44–45.

[34] In this volume, see the chapter by Robert Thomas as a statement by a "revised" dispensationalist (to use the term coined by Blaising and Bock though not necessarily endorsed by Thomas) and the chapter by Robert Saucy espousing "progressive" dispensationalism.

[35] Dispensationalists differ as to whether that promise will be fulfilled in the millennium or in the eternal state. Compare, for instance, the arguments of Thomas and Saucy in this volume.

[36] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 42–44.

better, an "intercalation" in the plan of God for Israel.[37] One difference between the "progressive" dispensationalists and the traditionalists in the movement is that the "progressives" see *some* application of the promises in the OT to Israel being applied to the church.[38] The rejection of Jesus/Messiah by Israel in the Gospels resulted in God offering the kingdom to whoever would receive it, whether Jews or Gentiles, but the future age of tribulation[39] and especially millennium will constitute a return to the covenant with Israel, in some manner.[40]

As to the other principles that Ryrie articulated as the distinctive features of dispensationalism, its "literal hermeneutic" and its goal as the glory of God, a couple of things need to be noted. First, the claim to a literal hermeneutic is not always followed by dispensational thinkers. John Walvoord, for instance, sees the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 as representative progressive ages in church history, an idea that has little or no foundation in the actual words of the text.[41] What dispensational thinkers generally insist on with the literal hermeneutic claim is that *Israel is Israel* and the church is the church; that is, the literal hermeneutic idea becomes a buttress for the land principle. As to the other principle, the glory of God, covenant theology is every bit as committed to that principle as dispensationalism is, as is readily obvious in any standard work of covenant theology.

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[37] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:40.

[38] Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church,* 84–91.

[39] Not all "progressive" dispensationalists hold to a pretribulational rapture. See T. Van McLain, "The Pretribulation Rapture: A Doubtful Doctrine," in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker, ETS Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 233–45.

[40] Dispensationalists hold varying views on how this will work, with Ryrie seeing the millennium as constituted of mortal Jews living their lives out under the rule of King Jesus, while Blaising and Bock see the millennial "saints" as resurrected Jews (Israelites) in glorified bodies ruling with Christ over the Gentile nations made up of mortals who survive the great tribulation and their progeny. See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 132–76; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 270–77. Some "progressive" dispensationalists see the millennium as glorified Israelites and Christians dwelling together under Christ's rule. See David L. Turner, "The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1–22:5: Consummation of a Biblical Continuum," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 264–92.

[41] John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 50–100. The idea serves a theological purpose for Walvoord, since the last church in the series is Laodicea, virtually an "apostate" church, and Walvoord's version of dispensationalism affirms the idea that the rapture happens in the context of a mostly apostate Christianity.

There is also the issue of "dispensations." Dispensationalists have disagreed over how many there are and over how hard the lines are between the dispensations. The *Scofield Reference Bible* famously argued for seven (see discussion of this in the various chapters of this book), but not all have agreed. There is further disagreement over the actual differences between the dispensations. Again Scofield *seemed* to argue for different means of salvation in the several dispensations, but "revised" and "progressive" dispensationalists have generally moved away from that idea.[42] In addition, even covenant theologians have argued for different eras in redemptive history—at least two: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace—though they tend to *flatten out* the biblical covenants, seeing the new covenant, as we pointed out above, as a virtual renewal of the Abrahamic covenant.[43]

In the past sixty or so years, a "mediating" position, or perhaps simply a *different* position, has come to the fore in several permutations.[44] Based on the work of several German scholars, especially Werner Kummel and Oscar Cullmann, but entering American scholarship early on through the writings of G. Eldon Ladd,[45] this view is distinct from both of the other positions in its ecclesiology and eschatology. Ladd agrees with dispensationalism's premillennialism, but not with its view of the pretribulational rapture of the church.[46] Also in contrast to dispensationalism, Ladd argues for the unity of Israel and the church: "The olive

[42] Scofield wrote that salvation under the old covenant came by keeping the law. See *Scofield Reference Bible*, note on Gen 12:1. Ryrie and others have contended that Scofield misspoke on this issue and would have written otherwise had he anticipated the fallout. See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 110–31. Others have argued otherwise. See Daniel P. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," PhD diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957, 164.

[43] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 63, and throughout their discussion.

[44] I would argue that this "mediating" position has been around for a long time, but it only became self-identified in its contrast to developed dispensationalism.

[45] Werner Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM, 1957); Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed., trans. F. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); G. Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

[46] Ladd, *Blessed Hope*, 61–136.

tree is one people of God."[47] One other issue related to dispensationalism that we have not covered, but that was of deep concern to Ladd, was dispensationalism's separatist ecclesiology. In part because of their polemic against liberalism, many (though certainly not all) dispensationalist leaders have separated out from denominational life and some, like Darby, have actually created new ecclesiological structures. Ladd rejected this separatism and the superficial ethical positions that he saw as entailed in this separatism.[48] Progressive dispensationalism has likewise not continued these ecclesiological or ethical practices.

Over against covenant theology, Ladd argues for a "believer's" relationship to both the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the "rite of admission" into the church, and "it symbolizes the believer's union with Christ in which he dies to his old life and is raised up to walk in newness of life."[49] He further states about baptism and circumcision, "It is not at all clear that Paul conceived of baptism as the Christian equivalent to circumcision."[50] What is clear in this is that Ladd is opposed to both the general ecclesiology of covenant theology, at least as to its genealogical principle, and to much of its eschatology, since he is premillennial, though not pretribulational. Ladd represents a position that is neither covenantal nor dispensational.

Over the past decades, others have joined the effort to carve out a position that is neither covenantal nor dispensational. Sometimes referred to as "new covenant theology" or "progressive covenantalism," this approach rejects both the land principle and the genealogical principle and asserts that Christ himself is the fulfillment of OT expectations.[51] Gentry and Wellum, as

[47] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 538.

[48] On this, see especially John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175–78.

[49] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 547–48. Ladd prefers the term "rite" to the term "sacrament."

[50] Ibid., 548.

[51] Representative works include Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002); Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009); John G. Reisinger, *Abraham's Four Seeds* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 1998); Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*. These works follow similar hermeneutical approaches but differ from one another in theological and pastoral application.

representatives, forge a *via media* between covenantal and dispensational theology and stress the unity of the Bible by tracing the redemptive-historical thread through the progressive covenants of Scripture. They view each covenant (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, new covenant) as progressively building on previous covenants but also as refining (my term) them in certain ways to address what is now *new* in progressive revelation.[52] This approach is based on the idea that "Jesus and the new covenant must become the hermeneutical lens by which we interpret the fulfillment of the types of the Old Testament."[53] For dispensationalism the key terms seem to be Jesus and Israel, for covenantalism the key terms seem to be Jesus and the church, while for "progressive covenantalism" the key term seems to be just *Jesus*. "The hopes and fears of all the years" are met in him and him alone.[54]

Four Views on Israel and the Church

The authors in this volume were asked to address several issues in relation to Israel and the church. Each has addressed the exegetical issues related to Israel and its relationship to God. They have also looked at what is distinctively new in the coming of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have analyzed these issues specifically in relationship to the doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology, the two areas of systematic theology that impinge most on the topic of Israel and the church. They have also addressed the issue of the modern state of Israel, and whether or not it has some role to play in the carrying out of God's plan of salvation for the world.

The essays are presented in the historical order that the various positions arose, reflected in the earlier part of this introduction. One way to view the difference between the positions is in terms of Richard Lints's three "horizons" of context: textual,

[52] See especially Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 591–716.

[53] Ibid., 608.

[54] Though we did not have access to the book by Gentry and Wellum while writing our essay for this volume, this is the basic position that Tom Pratt and I take in our chapter.

epochal, and canonical.[55] The *textual horizon* is the immediate context. One "cannot read all of the Bible at once,"[56] so the reader has to look at such things as grammar, genre, syntax, figures of speech, and other valid hermeneutical details. The second context is the *epochal horizon*, where texts are read in light of where they are in redemption history. As Lints has observed, "Redemption is an activity of God that unfolds over time. This unfolding movement in the biblical text is profoundly important to the accomplishment of its purposes."[57] Early revelation treats redemption somewhat differently than later Scripture. Circumcision, sacrifices, dietary laws, and other issues give way to fulfillment in Christ. There are also shifts that occur within the Old Testament and even within the short span of the New Testament. Third is what Lints terms the *canonical horizon*. Scripture must be read as a unified revelation, from first to last. The four approaches to the question of the church and Israel can each be seen to utilize these three horizons in different and distinct ways, but the key to understanding the differences lies mainly in Lints's second horizon, the *epochal*.

The first approach to Israel and the church in our volume is the traditional covenantal view. Robert Reymond argues for the covenantal view, contending for a greater degree of *continuity* between the old and new covenants than is characteristic of dispensationalism. In regard to the church/Israel debate, this continuity can be seen in the correlation between circumcision and baptism, with infant baptism being the analogue of circumcision—what I denominated as the "generational principle" earlier in this introduction. It can also be seen in the insistence that the church is the "new Israel," and, in Reymond's words, that the church now *replaces* Israel as the people of God (see p. 49). "There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile today, since God is calling out to himself a people from both groups," says O. Palmer Robertson, who then goes on to note that this "no distinction" will continue even in the age(s) to

[55] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311.

[56] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 93.

[57] Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 262.

come.[58] The epochal horizon for Reymond hardly moves from Old Testament to New Testament, with the discontinuity being primarily the replacement of the church for Israel and the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. There is no future for Israel as Israel, though Reymond and others in the covenantal tradition do believe there will be a future ingathering of Jewish persons into the church.

The second essay in this volume explicates the traditional dispensational position. Dispensationalists contend for a greater degree of *discontinuity* between Old and New Testaments, as well as a very different perspective on the relationship between the church and Israel. Robert Thomas sees the church as a parenthesis in God's overall strategy with reference to the covenant with Israel. After the rapture of the church, the covenant with Israel will be resumed with the 144,000 Jews in the tribulation period, and then continue on into the millennium with Israel ruling with Christ during the thousand years. He further notes, "Revelation 21:12,14 shows that Israel will have a role distinct from the church even in the new Jerusalem, the eternal state. As the special object of God's choice, she will ever be distinctive" (see p. 135). For Thomas, the epochal horizon from Old Testament to New Testament is a very large shift, as God's focus moves from Israel to another congregation, the church, but it is a move that will be somewhat, though not completely, reversed in the *eschaton* as the new congregation will also enjoy the blessings of eschatological bliss. Thomas also affirms the land principle, the continuity between the Testaments resides in the promise of land to Israel, and in fact affirms that as an eternal promise.[59]

The third view that has arisen chronologically, the progressive dispensational view, is articulated by Robert Saucy and maintains the land principle of traditional dispensationalism but modifies it by construing it as only lasting though the millennium, and not as an eternal distinction between Israel and the church. The epochal horizon is thus seen as moving from Israel

[58] O. Palmer Robertson, "Hermeneutics of Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 102.

[59] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 86.

to the church in the new covenant, but then back to Israel for tribulation and millennium, and then back to a unified people in the eternal state. Promises to Israel in the Old Testament are in some sense fulfilled in Christ but also in another sense still fulfilled in a literal way in the millennium.[60]

Finally, the fourth essay in this volume, by Tom Pratt and me, takes the progressive covenantal (inaugurated eschatology) or new covenant position, articulated by Ladd and now in a modified form by people like Zaspel and Wellum. We affirm with traditional covenantalism that there is a continuity between the Old and New Testaments in terms of a people of God and that the church is now the people of God, but we reject the notion of "replacement," since Israel is still the apple of God's eye and will be a subject of eschatological salvation. The new covenant position also rejects the genealogical principle of baptism being the analogue of circumcision since there is no description or prescription of infant baptism in the New Testament and since all texts relating to baptism presume that the persons being baptized are disciples of the Lord. This position also rejects the notion that there is a distinction between the two peoples of God in the millennium or the eternal state, as Paul argues in Ephesians 2 and other places, God has broken down the wall that divides the people of the Lord.[61] The epochal horizon is thus permanently shifted to the church with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, though God still has a concern for his old covenant people. This view also affirms that the "newness" of the new covenant includes the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the fact that Christ is the fulfillment of all Old Testament promises.

I commend these essays now to you, the reader. I believe you will learn much. But, even more, it is my prayer that this exercise will lead you to greater depth of worship and to a more impassioned commitment to proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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[60] It ought to be noted that there is a considerable range of opinions on controversial points among progressive dispensationalists, but Saucy is certainly one of the most respected voices in that circle.

[61] Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 480–87.